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## ***Coping with Empty Nest Syndrome***

When it comes time for your children to leave the home and begin life on their own, you and your spouse may face a challenging period of adjustment. How you choose to cope with your new reality as parents of a now independent adult will determine the speed and comfort level of this adjustment. By committing to work through your feelings together, support and communicate regularly with your adult children, and focus your energies on positive pursuits, you can ensure a more natural transition.

### **Understanding empty nest syndrome**

You probably first felt it when your child went away to summer camp or spent a week on vacation with her friend's family. Now that your child has grown up and has moved out or is preparing to leave, those same strong emotions such as sadness, guilt and worry may be coming back. You're having trouble "letting go," of acknowledging the sudden reality that you're no longer responsible for your child. At the same time, you're probably feeling proud of your child's accomplishments, happy for her and her new life, and perhaps excited about your newfound freedom. Experts call what you're experiencing "empty nest syndrome."

Empty nest syndrome doesn't have a set criteria for when it can begin or end. Every parent can feel it to a different degree and for a varying length of time. Although many parents adjust quickly and positively to this new lifestyle change by getting involved in hobbies and activities, many others encounter greater difficulty in responding to what is often a jarring transition.

In some parents, these unresolved, troubling feelings can be an indication that it's a good time to talk to someone, especially if you're experiencing symptoms of depression or anxiety. While it's normal to experience difficult emotions during or after an adult child's departure, don't be afraid to seek help and talk to a professional about your feelings, especially if they linger for a long time or interfere with your ability to function. Call a ComPsych Guidance Coordinator. We're ready to listen to your concerns around the clock and provide the help resources you need.

### **Coping tips**

Parents usually find different ways to get through empty nest emotions and adjust to their new roles. Consider these suggestions:

- Share your feelings with your child. He's probably feeling just as anxious and uncertain about his new life on his own as you are. Reassure him of your love and support. Offer your best advice on trying to succeed in the adult world and living up to responsibilities.
- Work on improving your parent-child relationship. If you feel that you've made mistakes or have regrets about your past approach to parenting, talk to your child about these feelings honestly and work to resolve guilty feelings. Be willing and available to talk to your child about these issues if he brings them up, as well.
- Discuss your feelings with your spouse. Be honest about the emotions you're experiencing. Try not to wait until your grown child leaves-talk about these issues as you're feeling them. Strive to be as sensitive to your spouse's needs as he or she is to yours.
- Respect your child's new independence. Be proud of his achievements and maturity. Let him know how proud you feel and demonstrate your faith in his maturity and self-reliance by trying not to hold on too tightly. Allow him to make his own decisions and tell him you'll always be there for support. Give your adult child room to grow and learn from his own mistakes.
- Look forward to your new role. Aim to be a supportive parent whom your child can confide in and rely on in

times of need. Encourage your child to visit whenever he feels like it, but try not to make him feel guilty about not coming around. Stay in touch regularly via email, letters, and phone calls.

- Focus on the future, not the past. While it's important to cherish happy, loving memories of you and your child, anticipate even happier times to come, such as the joyous times ahead when you may become a grandparent.
- Rediscover your partner. Now that you're alone again, take advantage of more time you can spend together participating in fun activities and being intimate. Look at this as a new opportunity to "date" each other again.
- Stay active. Get involved in side hobbies, activities, and recreational pursuits. Try a new sport and take lessons. Try to exercise regularly and keep fit. Think about pursuing educational goals -this may be a great time to get your undergraduate or Master's degree. Be creative by taking up an artistic hobby. Consider volunteering your time for a needy cause in your neighborhood.
- Connect with other empty nesters. Get to know other parents going through the same transitions you are, and share your stories and feelings with other empty nesters. Join an empty nest support group. Check community bulletin boards for support groups in your area. Find a chat room or support group on the Internet.
- Stay disciplined with money. An empty nest may also mean a bigger nest egg, now that you probably have less expenses and one less person to feed, clothe and shelter. If you're not careful, this extra money can be frittered away quickly. Look into retirement investments and consider establishing a disciplined savings plan.
- Use your time constructively. There's extra time on your hands now that you're no longer cooking, driving and cleaning up after your child. Try to use your time productively and creatively. Avoid falling into boring, lazy routines such as watching more hours of television every night to pass the time.
- Simplify your life. Talk to your partner about your housing needs. You may consider selling your large house and moving into a smaller, more practical abode that may require less maintenance. Try to stay active in your child's life now that he's left the nest by offering any help he may need in his adjustment. Make him feel welcome anytime at your home and be understanding of his new commitments and busy schedule. By respecting his privacy and independence he'll feel more accepted and understood in his new role.

If you have other EAP concerns, please call the toll free number, **1-888-290-4EAP** or TDD access at 1-800-697-0353. This employee/family benefit is provided by your employer. "For information related to your everyday concerns, go to [www.GuidanceResources.com](http://www.GuidanceResources.com). "First Time Users" will be prompted for their company ID: **FEDSOURCE**, to register and create your own username and password.

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